DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 194 481 SP 016 954

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TITLE Can We Have Equality and Educational Excellence? A Proposal for Maximum Gain for Minimum Investment.
PUB DATE Jan 80
NOTE 14p.: Prepared for Subcommittee on Elementary, Secondary, and Vocational Education "Needs of Elementary and Secondary Education in the 1980's: A Compendium of Policy Papers." For entire document (microfiche only), see ED 185 660. For individual documents (microfiche and paper copy), see SP 016 934.

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Academically Gifted; Demonstration Programs; Educational Finance; Educational Research; Elementary Secondary Education; Financial Policy; *Government Role; Inservice Teacher Education; Leadership Training; *Needs Assessment; *Program Development; *Talent Development

ABSTRACT

Not nearly enough money is going into the identification and development of gifted and talented children. Policy is more concerned with eliminating inequity than developing talent. A strong belief in equal treatment and opportunity has been translated into special education efforts for children in crisis, but not for children with special gifts. The federal role in helping gifted students has been tentative, and in comparison with concern for the handicapped, minimal. Budget and legislative decisions have been made not on the basis of what might be of ultimate benefit to society but on what is the greatest immediate crisis. To develop programs for gifted students, key administrative leadership is needed. Established and competent elementary and secondary training programs can provide the base upon which an intensive inservice training program, especially training, and improved leadership is presented. (SAS)

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CAN WE HAVE EQUALITY AND EDUCATIONAL EXCELLENCE?

A PROPOSAL FOR MAXIMUM GAIN FOR MINIMUM INVESTMENT

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SP 016 954

Policy paper for
Committee on Education and Labor
Carl Perkins, Chairman
House of Representatives
November 1, 1979

U S DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION

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The Issue

The massive decentralized enterprise we call American education has no shortage of paradoxes. Divided into thousands of semi-independent school systems this enterprise directly involves, as student or teacher, one out of every four Americans, and indirectly many more (National Center for Educational Statistics, 1978).

There is hardly any more puzzling issue than how the most gifted and talented of our students are treated in our public schools. Despite manifest evidence of their potential adult contributions to a society with many desperate problems crying for solution, the schools rarely provide special stimulation for the enhancement of youthful gifts, even when such stimulation could have the greatest cost benefits of any other investment we can make in education.

Gallagher (1979) has proposed that we, as a society, have a strong love-hate relationship with the gifted. On one hand, we revere the gifted individual who has risen from a humble background. We are proud to live in a society where talent can triumph over environment, or family status. At the same time, since our origins came from battling an aristocratic elite, we are suspicious of attempts to subvert our commitment to egalitarianism. We do not wish a new elite class to develop, and as a result we seem to waver in our attitudes. We design our elementary and secondary programs for gifted students in ways that can be defended by careful administrators as giving no special favors, no tipping the scales in favor of the socially powerful or the specially endowed

John Gardner (1961) asked two decades ago whether we can be equal and excellent too, and we are still struggling to answer that question. In the long history of Western man, we have honored many gifted individuals who provided us with new perceptions of humanity, and its environment. Plato, Mendel, Copernicus, Freud, Darwin, Curie, Shakespeare, Bronte, and Piaget have each shown us a different portrait of ourselves and our world. Those changing portraits, in turn, have resulted in major transformation in our society and civilization (Goertzel & Goertzel, 1978).

Below this level of genius are layers of other often unrecognized gifted and talented individuals who have made significant, although less society-shaking, contributions. The scientific discoveries, the creative writing, the art, and the music that this second echelon of gifted individuals have produced also have played a major role in changing the fabric of our civilization.

<u>If we ignore the education of these gifted and talented individuals, we cheat both them and the larger society of their true potential</u>.

Some social forces that seem to inhibit more constructive planning for gifted have been identified as:

1. <u>Egalitarianism</u> - A strong belief in "equal" treatment and opportunity which has been translated into special educational efforts for children in crisis, but not for children with special gifts.
2. <u>Universal Education</u> - The noble commitment of U.S. to full education for all children creates a range of talents in junior and senior high schools that are difficult to manage or plan for.

3. Decentralization of Educational Decision Making - When each separate school district makes its own major educational decisions, the need for special education for the gifted does not seem as pressing as other, more immediate needs. The program stimulus for the gifted often comes from the state and federal levels of government where the societal needs are more apparent.
4. Sense of Societal Confidence - As long as there is confidence in the ability of the United States to conquer any obstacle, then the pressure to provide special educational help for the talented is quite low. When some of that overconfidence is lost, then there is increased pressure to build programs that would enhance the education of the most talented students in the society (and thus enhance our overall ability to meet and overcome crises).

Nor has the stimulation of our best students been an entirely novel idea. Thomas Jefferson, in his Notes on The State of Virginia stated,

> We hope to avail the state of those talents which nature has sown as liberally among the poor as the rich, but which perish without use, if not sought for and cultivated.

Gifted education has profited, ironically, from World War II, the Sputnik crisis, and the current problems of energy, population pollution, and international conflict. The federal role in helping gifted students has been, however, tentative, oblique, and late.

Some programs, such as the National Defense Education Act and the National Science Foundation curriculum initiatives of the 1950-1960 era, aided many gifted students, but it was not until the Educational Amendments

of 1969, through a specific amendment proposed by Congressman John Erlenborn of Illinois, that the federal government took official cognizance of the existence of gifted and talented students (Jackson, 1979).

This amendment directed the U.S. Commissioner of Education to launch a study that was to have four basic objectives: a) to discover the extent to which special education provisions were necessary to meet the needs of gifted and talented children, b) to discover whether any existing federal programs were currently meeting some of those needs, c) to evaluate how programs of federal educational assistance could become more effective in meeting these needs, and d) to recommend what new programs were needed to meet them.

The congressional mandate was fulfilled on October 6, 1971, when U.S. Commissioner of Education Sidney P. Marland submitted to the Congress a document that can be viewed as the embryo of recent developments in gifted child education.[1] The Marland report offered recommendations for eleven actions to be taken under then existing legislative authority (P.L. 91-230, Sec. 806). The recommendations called for a) a planning report on implementing a federal role in educating the gifted and talented; b) the establishment of a staff within USOE for gifted education; c) a national survey of programs to find costs, evaluation procedures, and model programs and to develop a clearinghouse on gifted/talented education; d) the utilization of Title V of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act to strengthen capabilities for gifted/talented education; e) two national

[1] Sidney P. Marland, Jr., Education of the Gifted and Talented, Vol. 1, Report to the Congress of the United States by the U.S. Commissioner of Education (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1972).

summer leadership training institutes to upgrade supervisory personnel in state education agencies; f) program and research support for institutions interested in gifted children in minority groups; g) program activities specific to career education for the gifted and talented; h) special attention in one experimental school to project the relation between gifted and talented education and comprehensive school reform; i) cooperation with Title III programs; j) one staff member for each of the ten regional Offices of Education to be assigned to gifted and talented education; and k) the study of Office of Education programs relating to higher education to optimize their potential for the gifted and talented.

Current Status of Gifted Education

The history of support for programs for exceptional children in the U.S. Office of Education gives us some insight into the cultural problems of the gifted and the talented in our society. The federal government provides over $900 million in Fiscal Year 1979 to improve the education of school-aged handicapped children. These dollars are certainly needed; in fact, they do not provide all that handicapped children need in the way of special education services. But during that same year, the federal government provided only slightly over $3 million for gifted and talented children. In short, for every dollar spent on a gifted child for special education, $100 is spent on a handicapped child.

Are these the appropriate expenditure proportions for exceptional children in our society? Probably not. It does reflect the political realities that attend our present system of crisis decision making in government. Gifted children suffer because they are a "cool," or

long-range, problem. Budget and legislative decisions are made not on the basis of what might be of ultimate benefit to society but on what is the greatest immediate crisis. Gifted children may be our best long-range investment in education, but they do not create problems of immediate significance; nor have they had a vocal constituency capable of extracting attention and dollars from public policymakers.

Mitchell and Erickson (1978, p. 13) reported from a national survey on current policies, resources, and services that the national picture of educational programs for gifted and talented children in 1976-77 was slightly better than it was in 1971-72: More gifted and talented students are being identified and served; more states have statutes and policy documents concerning their education; more money is being allocated to educational programs for these special children; more personnel are being assigned to work in this area; and more training is available. They concluded, however, that, "Despite the fact (that) there is 'more of everything' now than there was in 1972, . . . the United States still falls far short of meeting the educational needs of this special segment of its population."

One of the substantial changes that the federal legislation did bring about was a new definition which broadened our concept of gifted beyond the academic to include the performing arts, crativity, and leadership.

It also encouraged a search for minority group gifted students, often overlooked by traditional screening methods. Both of these trends furthered the attempt to democratize the gifted and recognize that many gifts can be found at all levels and walks of our society.

A Plan for Catalytic Support

The question now is, where do we go from here? With parents' groups forming active and sometimes militant interest groups, and educators themselves sensing a growing ground swell of interest, what is a reasonable role for the federal government to play to take advantage of the current momentum for special programs for the gifted at the state and the local level? I believe it is possible to amend and enhance Public Law 93-380 and Public Law 95-561 to provide a supportive and catalytic role at minimal expense to the federal government, but with maximum potential return to American citizens. This can be done through a specific enhancing of those support system elements that are at the heart of quality education programs. Five specific elements can be authorized, and a modest increase in appropriation could provide for the minimum support necessary to provide leadership and stimulate the continued and growing interest at the local and state levels. These are:

1. Leadership training. Past experience with the development of programs for handicapped children or vocational education have shown the importance of preparing, through higher education programs, key administrative leadership. This small cadre of administrators will then take important roles in state departments of education, teacher training institutions, and research institutes (Martin, 1976). The development of their ideas and their leadership can influence the field for the next two decades.

2. Continuous inservice training. It is clearly not enough to identify outstanding teachers and assign them to special programs for the gifted. Further, there is no likelihood that the universities, through preservice training programs, can provide the specialized training necessary for teachers of the gifted. What is more likely is that already established and competent elementary and secondary teacher training programs can provide the base upon which an intensive inservice training program, specially devoted to programmatic modifications for the gifted, can be built. Therefore, funds should be made available to states and local communities to allow for these inservice training programs to develop and multiply.

3. Research and development. In the search for quality programs there is perhaps nothing more needed than critical research on various aspects of gifted education. The growing trend to earmark already limited research funds for specific target groups such as the handicapped or the economically disadvantaged has reduced the small research resources available in education to almost nothing for gifted education. As long as such earmarked funds exist, it seems important to add a small amount of earmarked money for gifted education to stimulate research dealing with the instructional process, curriculum innovation, and program evaluation.

4. Demonstration programs. The expenditure of small sums of money to make visible those innovative and exemplary programs in all parts of the United States already in existence can place an

educational spotlight on successful and practical educational planning for gifted students in urban, rural, and suburban areas. By judicious selection, these programs can focus on programs enhancing minority group gifted, special programs in mathematics, gifted women, and other long neglected groups, as well as showing what can be done in more traditional program areas.

5. State leadership. In other fields of education, one of the most productive investments that the federal government has made is to provide for the addition to a state leadership team of someone specially interested and trained in those areas needing development and expansion. It has been demonstrated in a number of instances that the presence of such a trained and committed individual has been the key to further development of programs within the state. Therefore, providing small sums of seed money that allow the state departments to add to their staff in the area of program planning for the gifted could be a useful investment.

What is necessary to accomplish this catalytic thrust forward is a small increase to the current miniscule commitment to the gifted from the 6.28 million level for 1980 to the 50 million level.

The budget for such a catalytic program would be modest in terms of practically every other federal program in existence adding to less than 50 million per year, but its benefits would be immeasurable. An

example of such an allocation of funds could be as follows:

Leadership Training	
10 programs 200K/program	$ 2,000,000
Inservice Training	
250K/state x 50 states	$12,500,000
Research and Development	
40 projects at 100K	$ 4,000,000
6 projects at 250K	$ 1,500,000
Demonstration	
State 300K per 50 states	$15,000,000
National 500K per/6	$ 3,000,000
State Planning	
30K x 50 states	$ 1,500,000
TOTAL	$39,500,000

This would be sufficient to provide the catalytic base for exciting innovations and quality personnel. It is hoped that specific authorization for these support features could stimulate a more adequate appropriations level.

It is not conceived that any major direct support program from the federal level would be desirable or necessary. The federal government should remain in a catalytic stance stimulating already evidenced interests of the local and state educational leaders to provide them with the necessary additional stimulus to allow them to go forward on their own with direct service resources that they seem willing to provide.

This program would guarantee productive new insights and educational adventures at a minimum cost. It would aid gifted students, but more important, through them, benefit all students.

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